

Guides students through the process of locating and applying for financial aid. Prepared by the Congressional Research Service for Members of Congress, updated September 2009.

- [The basics: getting started](#)
- [Student aid and where it comes from](#)
- [Targeted aid for specific groups](#)
- [Repaying your loans](#)

[The basics: getting started](#)

- **Start gathering information early.**

Free information is readily available from:

- High school counselors
- College and career school financial aid offices (where you plan to attend)
- Local and college libraries
- [Student Aid on the Web](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- Other Internet sites (search terms student financial aid OR assistance)

Ask questions: counselors may know if you have exceptional circumstances that affect your eligibility.

Keep copies of all forms and correspondence: you must reapply for aid each year.

Parents of students: save money long before your child attends college.

- [FinAid: for Parents](#)
- [College Savings Plan Network](#) (state "Section 529" plans)
- [Tax incentives for higher education expenses](#)

Good overviews:

- [Cash for College](#)
- [FinAid: The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid](#)
- [Financial Aid: You Can Afford It](#)

- [Looking for Student Aid](#)
- [Mapping Your Future](#)
- [Paying for College](#)

Beware of scholarship scams -- don't pay for free information!

- [Department of Education](#)
- [Federal Trade Commission](#)

[Student aid and where it comes from](#)

Basic assistance categories:

- **Financial need-based**

Remember that students and their parents are responsible for paying what they can -- financial aid is a supplement, not a substitute, for family resources.

- **Non need-based**

Factors include academic excellence, ethnic background, or organization membership. Corporations may also offer assistance to employees and children.

Federal Student Aid:

- Provides nearly 70% of student aid under Loans, Grants and Work/study programs.
- Available to all need-based applicants; some loans and competitive scholarships for non need-based.
- Free information from the United States Department of Education:
 - [Student Aid on the Web](#)
 - [Financial Aid Resource Publications](#)
- **Loans** are the most common federal aid and must be repaid when you graduate or leave college.
 - Stafford Loans (FFELs and Direct Loans) include:
 - [Federal Family Education Loans](#) (FFEL) from private lenders, such as banks and credit unions, guaranteed by the federal government.
 - [Federal PLUS Loan](#) s parental loans, not need-based.

- [Perkins Loans \[Download a free PDF reader\]](#) for the most needy undergraduates; through participating schools.

- **Scholarships/grants** are mostly need-based and require no repayment:
- [Pell Grants](#)
- [Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants \(FSEOG\)](#)

- **Other grants, scholarships, and fellowships, mostly graduate level:** search the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) by Beneficiary, such as "Student or Trainee" or "Graduate Student".

- **"Congressional" scholarships:**
- Named for Member of Congress or other prominent individual (such as Byrd Honors Scholarships, Fulbright fellowships)
- Merit-based and highly competitive
- Members of Congress do not play a role in selecting recipients

- **Work study** programs allow you to earn money while in school:
- Federal Work Study Program: college campus jobs
- Student Educational Employment: jobs with the federal government

- For questions not covered by the Department of Education Web site, call the **Federal Student Aid Information Center** at 1-800-433-3243.

States offer residents a variety of scholarships, loans, and tuition exemptions.

- Check with your [State Higher Education Agency](#) and [State Guarantee Agency](#).
- Consider prepaid tuition and college savings ("Section 529") plans: [College Savings Plans Network](#)
- Search your Internet browser under terms such as **student financial aid** or **assistance A ND your state**

Colleges and universities provide some 20% of aid, most need-based. Check [university web sites](#) and the institution's financial aid office when you apply for admission.

Private foundations, corporations, and organizations offer scholarships or grants:

- [College Board Scholarship Search](#)
- [FastWeb](#)
- [Grants for Individuals](#)

Targeted aid for special groups

- [Grants for Minorities](#) : Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, Native Americans, and Other Ethnic Groups
- [African Americans](#) : For Students: Scholarships
- [Disabled students](#) : Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities
- [Foreign students](#) : Financial Aid for International Students
- [Hispanic Americans](#) : Scholarships
- [Law school students](#) : Financial Aid for Law School
- [Medical students](#) : Financing Your Medical Education
- [Native Americans](#) : American Indian College Fund
- [Study abroad](#) (for U.S. and non-U.S. citizens): International Financial Aid
- [Veterans](#) : Education Benefits

Interested in public service?

Federal assistance programs seek to encourage people to work in geographic areas or professions where there's a particular need (such as doctors in underserved areas); encourage underrepresented groups to enter a particular profession; and provide aid in exchange for services provided (such as military service).

- [AmeriCorps Education Award](#)

Volunteers who complete one year of service receive an education award for current higher education expenses or to repay student loans.

- [Army Tuition Assistance](#)

Additional benefits for Army personnel.

- [Bureau of Health Professions](#)

Scholarships and loans to needy health profession students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- [e-Scholar](#)

Scholarships, grants, fellowships, internships, and cooperative education with federal agencies.

- [Indian Health Service](#)

Scholarships for American Indian/Alaskan Native health profession students and loan repayment for persons working in IHS facilities.

Military academies:

- [United States Air Force Academy](#)
- [United States Coast Guard Academy](#)
- [United States Merchant Marine Academy](#)
- [United States Military Academy](#)
- [United States Naval Academy](#)

- [National Health Service Corps](#)

Scholarships and loan repayment for health profession students who agree to work in underserved areas

- [Nursing Scholarships](#)

Offered in exchange for two years of

Service in areas with critical nursing shortages.

- Reserve Officers Training Corps ([ROTC](#))

For students who want to be commissioned as officers after graduating from college.

- [United States Air Force ROTC](#)
- [United States Army ROTC](#)

- [United States Navy ROTC](#)

Aid for private K-12 education: No direct federal assistance, check with schools themselves:

- [Coverdell Education Savings Accounts](#) : for elementary and secondary school expenses as well as higher education.

[Repaying your loans](#)

After college, the **federal government** has ways to help you [repay your loans](#) .

- Eligibility depends upon the type of loan, when it was made, and whether it's in default. Check with your loan officer to find out if you qualify.

- [Loan Consolidation](#) : combine your federal loans into a single loan with one monthly payment.

- Sometimes loans may be canceled in exchange for public service.
- [Teachers](#) : Cancellation/Deferment Options
- Health professions: [National Health Service Corps](#)
- Law school graduates: [State Loan Repayment/Forgiveness Programs](#)
- Medical school graduates: [Loan Repayment Program](#)
- Federal employees: [Federal Student Loan Repayment Program](#)
- If you are having problems with your loan and all other approaches fail, contact the Department of Education's [Office of the Ombudsman](#).